

U. S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



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**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

**U. S. COAST GUARD**

**STATEMENT OF**

**REAR ADMIRAL SALLY BRICE-O'HARA**

**ON THE**

**EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR THE TOTAL MILITARY FORCE**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**MARCH 15, 2006**



# United States Coast Guard Biography

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## **REAR ADMIRAL SALLY BRICE-O'HARA, USCG** **Director of Reserve and Training**



Rear Admiral Sally Brice-O'Hara was assigned as Director of Reserve and Training on 08 July 2005. She serves as director of the Coast Guard Reserve and is charged with developing policies to recruit, train, allocate, and support over 12,000 Coast Guard Ready Reservists. She serves as a member of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, which advises the Secretary of Defense on Reserve matters.

Rear Admiral Brice-O'Hara is additionally responsible for the planning and technical control of the Coast Guard Training Centers. She is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Coast Guard Academy and serves as the Chairman of the Commandant's Leadership Advisory Council.

Throughout her career, Rear Admiral Brice-O'Hara has enjoyed a wide variety of assignments. Previously she served as Commander of the Fifth Coast Guard District. She oversaw activities of more than 3,010 Coast Guard employees and 6,300 volunteers of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, 11 helicopters, 170 boats and 21 cutters. Annually, this team rescues more than 500 people and \$41.6 million in property, services 7,100 navigational aids, conducts more than 14,000 law enforcement boardings, and investigates 340 oil or chemical spills. Maritime Homeland Security missions include thousands of waterside patrols and escorts of hundreds of ships carrying volatile or high value cargoes.

She served as the Director of Personnel Management, administering an extensive range of Service-wide human resource programs. At the time of selection to flag rank, she was Commanding Officer of Training Center Cape May, site of the Coast Guard's only recruit training program. Previous operational duties include command of Station Cape May, NJ, and Group Baltimore, MD, as well as a short stint as Deputy Commander of Activities Baltimore where she was also the Alternate Captain of the Port. Earlier positions of significance were Assistant Director of Admissions at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT, Planning Officer at Support Center Kodiak, AK, and Strategic Planner for the Commandant.

A native of Annapolis, MD, she graduated from Goucher College with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology in 1974. She received her Coast Guard commission from Officer Candidate School the following year. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Public Administration from Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, a Master of Science Degree in National Security Strategy from the National War College, and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters awarded by Goucher College in 2002.

Rear Admiral Brice-O'Hara's personal awards include two Legions of Merit, a Meritorious Service Medal, six Coast Guard Commendation Medals, a Coast Guard Achievement Medal, and the Commandant's Letter of Commendation. She and her husband Bob have two sons, Chip and Brice.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss educational benefits for members of the Selected Reserve.

I wish to begin by thanking you for inviting me here today. The Coast Guard Reserve pioneered the full integration of Selected Reservists into Active Component units during the mid-1990s. We are always eager to explore means to achieve full parity and seamless transitions between the Active and Reserve Components.

As has been stated by the other Reserve Component Chiefs today, we believe educational benefits such as the Montgomery GI Bill, authorized by Chapter 30 of Title 38, and the Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR), authorized under Chapter 1606 of Title 10, are important components in recruiting and retaining Coast Guard Active Duty and Reserve personnel. We also believe the Tuition Assistance Program, authorized by Title 10, Section 2007, is another valuable tool for recruiting and retaining the talent we need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

During fiscal year 2005, 4,514 Coast Guard members – Active Duty, Reserve and veterans – benefited from the Montgomery GI Bill for Active Duty (Chapter 30) claims. During fiscal year 2005, approximately 155 Reservists benefited from MGIB-SR by participating in vocational, undergraduate and graduate programs, utilizing \$707,853 towards tuition fees. Fiscal year 2005 utilization compared with \$786,913 in fiscal year 2004 and \$717,855 in fiscal year 2003.

At the end of January 2006, we began aggressively marketing the benefits available to mobilized Reservists under the Reserve Education Assistance Program, or (REAP), authorized under Chapter 1607 of Title 10. Currently approximately 3,600 Selected Reservists are authorized to take advantage of REAP benefits as a result of being mobilized in excess of 90 days. To date, we have received 30 queries about this program from our members, and we anticipate a dramatic increase in utilization as knowledge of this program continues to permeate to those eligible reservists. Although the policy and announcement of the program were not distributed until after the start of the 2006 spring academic term, we expect to see payments increase because service members are authorized to submit their claims at any time during the semester, just as with the Chapter 30 and MGIB-SR. This program is still in its early stages and we are confident that participation will increase through our ongoing communications efforts.

The Coast Guard's Tuition Assistance program, which provides a maximum of \$4,500 per year to individual Active Duty and Selected Reserve members, also remains a popular program. In fiscal year 2005, Coast Guard Selected Reservists utilized \$2.8 million in benefits, up from \$2.3 million in fiscal year 2004 and \$1.6 million in fiscal year 2003. Among our Active Duty force, Tuition Assistance utilization totaled \$10.7 million in fiscal year 2005, \$9.9 million in fiscal year 2004 and \$7.2 million in fiscal year 2003.

The Coast Guard Recruiting Command, which is responsible for recruitment of all Active Duty and Reserve members (fiscal year 2006 goals: 1,390 Selected Reservists and 3,800 Active Duty), indicates that educational benefits are among the top reasons individuals join the Coast Guard and affiliate with the Coast Guard Reserve. For instance, the fact that Selected Reserve members are not required to pay into the MGIB-SR is a plus, according to the Recruiting Command. The non-taxable status of the payments, and the ability of members to combine MGIB-SR with Tuition Assistance, is also cited as an accessions draw.

We are maintaining our funded Selected Reserve end-strength of 8,100. We believe educational assistance programs help explain why Coast Guard Selected Reserve retention remains at historically high, pre-911 levels, currently 87.4 percent, despite very heavy utilization of our force for Maritime Homeland Security and National Defense missions. The Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Reserve, who spends much of his time visiting units and their crews, is convinced that educational benefits are particularly useful in first-term retention of enlisted members.

Like the other reserve components, we are looking forward to seeing the results of the joint Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs working group that is examining the possibility of a “Total Force” education benefit that would combine the best features of existing programs to better serve the men and women of the Coast Guard and the other military services. Clearly, our paramount concern is that there would be no reduction in the quality of service our members receive, particularly ease of access and timely receipt of benefits. Also, we would want to ensure that the data systems are in place at the Department of Veterans Affairs to accommodate any new program.

To conclude, as one of the seven Reserve Components, the Coast Guard Reserve values its longstanding partnership with the Department of Defense components in defending America at home and abroad, and is eager to maintain parity of benefits for the men and women who serve so well, which is why I am happy to join my colleagues before this committee. Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.